



*Restructuring  
Negative  
Self-Talk*

*Facilitator  
Guide*

## Restructuring Negative Self-Talk

**Time:** 3 Hours

**Age:** 7-11

### Objective:

- Patients will be able to identify and challenge negative self-talk by replacing negative statements with more positive, helpful ones.

### Materials:

- **Restructuring Negative Self-Talk Slide Deck**
- **Restructuring Negative Self-Talk In-Session Workbook**
- **Restructuring Negative Self-Talk Task Cards**
- Media-playing device (digital whiteboard/computer/smart TV)
- Blank A4 paper
- Art supplies
- Comfort items (stress balls/plush animals or pillows)
- *Max's Box: Letting Go of Negative Feelings* by Brian Smith
- *The Whatifs* by Emily Kilgore
- *Your Thoughts Matter: Negative Self-Talk, Growth Mindset* by Esther Cordova

### Outline:

#### 1. Introduction and Warm-Up - Slide 2 - (20 minutes)

- **Welcome:** As patients arrive, encourage them to share their work on Growth Mindset from the previous session.
- **Review Group Norms:** Welcome anyone new to the group. Using a quick "plush throw," review all group norms.
- **Partner Check-In:** Patients will spend five minutes checking in with a partner and discussing the questions on the board. The facilitator monitors conversations and interjects if needed.
- **Whole Group:** Patients share one takeaway from their conversation.

## 2. Objective - Slide 3 - (10 minutes)

- **Define Negative Self-Talk:** "Sometimes we have mean thoughts about ourselves – those are like our inner voice being grumpy. Have you ever had thoughts like that? We all have, and it's completely normal, but that doesn't make it healthy."
- **Quick Brainstorm:** Brainstorm common negative thoughts with the patients. Write them on the board, emphasizing that having these thoughts is okay and completely normal, but we can change them.
- **Feelings and Actions:** Discuss how negative thoughts can make us feel bad or inadequate, leading to unhelpful actions.
- **Read the Session Objective:** Read the session objective aloud. Next, have the patients read the objective aloud before writing it into their Restructuring Negative Self-Talk In-Session Workbook.
- **Turn and Talk:** Have patients turn to the person next to them and take a few minutes to discuss how this skill can be helpful and how it may benefit the patients in their daily lives.
- **Whole Group:** Briefly share the main takeaways.

## 3. Max's Box - Slides 4-5 - (15 minutes)

- **Slide 4-5: (reading the physical copy of Max's Box is recommended)**
- **Focus Task:** Preview the Focus Task for Max's Box (**Restructuring Negative Self-Talk In-Session Workbook—Pg. 2**) to help patients understand what they're looking for. **If you have a child who needs help with reading or writing, pair them with someone who can provide support and promote inclusion.**
- **Story Time:** Read through Max's Box, carefully ensuring everyone can see the illustrations and fill in their workbook.
- **Partner Work:** Have patients stand up and find a new partner. Together, they will go over their responses and discuss similarities and differences.
- **Whole Group:** Discuss focus question answers and main takeaways.

#### 4. "A.N.T. Buddies" - Slide 6 - (5 Minutes)

- **Video Clip:** Play the video clip, pausing to allow time for patients to fill in how to identify "A.N.T. Buddies" (**Restructuring Negative Self-Talk In-Session Workbook—Pg. 3**). Draw attention to how "A.N.T. Buddies" can sound like "aint" buddies, which is exactly right... They "ain't" your buddies!"

#### 5. Individual Work - Slide 7 - (5 Minutes)

- **Instructions:** "On page three of your Restructuring Negative Self-Talk In-Session Workbook, you will see some blank space for you to fill in. I would like you to take five minutes to write or draw three examples of negative self-talk or "A.N.T. buddies" you have had. They can be ones you think often or something you've felt recently. Only write down what you would feel comfortable sharing with a partner. If you finish early, start thinking about ways you might make the statements more positive."

#### 6. Break - Slide 8 (5 Minutes)

#### 7. Direct Instruction: Identifying, Challenging, and Restructuring Negative Thoughts - Slides 9 - 20 - (30 minutes)

- **Slide 9: Identifying "A.N.T. Buddies":** "The first step in defeating the "A.N.T. Buddies" is identifying them. We are going to learn how to do that now."
- **Slide 10: Absolute Words:** "Words like "always" and "never" suggest that things are black or white when, in reality, there's a whole spectrum of colors in between."
- **Slide 11: Example:** "For instance, if you say, "I'll never score a goal. I should just quit!" it feels like you'll never be any good, which might not be true."  
**Alternative:** "Instead, we can use words that leave room for possibilities. Maybe you could say, "Soccer can be tricky, but I can practice and get better. Eventually, I will score a goal."  
**Concept Check:** "Let's do a quick check to see how we are doing. I want everyone to stand up. Do a quick shake to get relaxed. I am going to give you a word, and if you think it's an all-or-nothing, an absolute, an "A.N.T. Buddy" word, give me a big thumbs up. If

it's not, meaning it can be more flexible, give me a big thumbs down. Now, I want you to close your eyes.

- Is "totally" an absolute word?
- Is "sometimes" an all-or-nothing word?
- Is "only" an absolute word?
- Is "everything" an all-or-nothing word?
- Is "occasionally" an absolute word?

**Pair Brainstorm:** "What other words might indicate all or nothing, or "A.N.T. Buddy" thinking?"

Possible responses include:

All	Always	Complete	Completely	Constantly
Definitely	Entire	Ever	Every	Everyone
Everything	Forever	Full	Must	Never
Nobody	Nobody	Only	Totally	Whole

"Is recognizing words like this something you think you can do? Let's try. We will have a race to see who can find how many times a poem uses the word "never." Only play if you want to."

• **Slide 12: The Poem:**

The voice inside; it whispers low,  
 "You'll never win; you'll never grow."  
 Never good, and never smart,  
 Never worthy in your heart.  
 Never strong, and never brave,  
 Never escaping from this cave.  
 Never flying, never free,  
 Never the person you want to be.  
 Never, never, rings the chime,  
 But never give in; there's still time.

- **Slide 13: Be Specific:** "Statements that are general, vague, or focus on things out of our control are not helpful. Instead of personality traits, use specific actions or events."
- **Slide 14: Example:** "For instance, the statement, "I'm such a loser," doesn't explain why the person is feeling this way. "I feel like a loser because all of my friends are busy doing something else" now that we have specifics, we can begin to restructure. "It is late notice, and it makes sense that my friends are busy."
- **Concept Check:** "Let's do another quick check to see how we are doing. Stand up one more time. This time, if you think the situation is general, throw it away like you're throwing a baseball as hard as you can. If you think the statement is specific, slide it into your pocket. Once again, I want you to close your eyes.
  - Animals need things to survive.
  - I like food.
  - My dog needs to go for a walk twice a day.
  - Reading expands your knowledge.
  - Harry Potter exposes children to the world of fantasy and rich character development.
  - Mexican food is my favorite, especially tacos and nachos.
- **Slide 15: Add a Counterexample:** "Providing a real counterexample of when that negative statement wasn't true can help us escape the mind trap that "A.N.T. Buddies" create."
- **Slide 16: Example:** "For instance, if the statement is, "I'm a terrible person," we can think back to a time we did something nice for someone. "I can be a good person. Just last week, I spent time with my grandma and helped her shop."
- **Concept Check:** "This time, for our concept check, I want you to think of a counterexample to the statement, "I'm no good." (Give patients a minute to consider their answers and use a "ball throw" to elicit responses.)
- **Slide 17: Summarize Restructuring Steps:** "Next, we will put all these things into practice."
- **Slide 18: Example and Restructure:** "Let's do this one together." What do you notice?" "What might be a healthy restructure for this statement? Take one or two minutes and try

to restructure this with your partner." (Monitor and provide support. Bring it back to the group and highlight good examples). Possible examples include:

- "This concept is challenging, but I'm determined to figure it out."
  - "I'm stuck on this problem for now, but I know I can learn from it and improve with practice."
  - "I don't understand this yet, but that's okay. I'm going to ask for help and keep trying."
  - "I'm going to ask my teacher/friend/tutor for clarification on this."
  - "Maybe I can break this problem down into smaller steps to make it easier to understand."
  - "This problem is having a tough time defeating me! But I won't give up!"
  - "Maybe my brain just needs a little break. I'll come back to this later with fresh eyes."
- **Slides 19 - 20: Repeat the previous activity.**

#### **8. Partner Work - Slide 21 - (10 Minutes)**

- **Instructions:** "Step 1: With the person next to you, look over the examples of the "A.N.T. Buddies" you both wrote down earlier (during independent work time). Step 2: Using the strategies we just learned, restructure the negative thoughts into more positive, healthy ones." (Monitor and offer help. Advance to **Slide 22** to provide additional scaffolding.)

#### **9. Group Share - Slide 23 - (15 Minutes)**

- **Instructions:** Have one group at a time come up and share their progress. To keep everyone engaged, the participants watching should think of one positive thing and one suggestion to give to each presenter. Depending on group size and time, not everyone will share their praise and advice each time. Discuss the main takeaways.

#### **10. Break - Slide 24 (10 Minutes)**

### 11. Deliberate Practice and Reinforcement - Slide 25 - (15 minutes)

- **Instructions:** "Now it's time to practice what we've learned to improve our skill and be more confident to use it whenever we have a negative thought. Step 1: Find a partner. Step 2: Alternate reading statements from the "A.N.T. buddies" task cards so you and your partner can restructure them. Step 3: When you hear the signal, switch to a new partner and start again. It is okay if you haven't gone through your entire list when it's time to switch." (Distribute task cards, monitor conversations, initiate partner switches as needed). **Note: This is an excellent time to take group notes highlighting patient progress in demonstrating a skill.**

### 12. Whole Group Discussion - Slide 26 - (5 Minutes)

- **Questions:** "What were your major takeaways from this exercise?" "Do you find that identifying and restructuring negative thoughts is becoming easier? Why or why not?" "How will you use this tool after we leave here today?"

### 13. Creative Expression - Slide 27 - (20 Minutes)

- **Revisit Books:** "Who can remember the three books we've read over this and the previous sessions that deal with feelings and negative emotions?" (Elicit responses: Max's Box, The Whatifs, Your Thoughts Matter) "What do all of these have in common?" (Discuss)
- **Instructions:** "Today, for creative expression, you will create a story of your own that incorporates restructuring negative self-talk. It can be about you and real-life negative thoughts, or it can be a work of fiction. You can use examples we have already covered today or new ideas. You might want to think about using dull, sad colors at the beginning of your book and then switching to brighter ones as the story progresses. It's entirely up to you. You can keep adding chapters and examples until the end of this activity." (Place books in the center of the room for easy access.)

#### 14. Small Group Share (5 Minutes)

- **Instructions:** In a small group of three to four, share what you created with each other. (Monitor conversations.)

#### 15. Whole Group Wrap (10 minutes)

- **Prompt:** Let each participant respond to the prompt. "Share your number one takeaway from today." "How will you use your new skill to help you reach your goals?"
- **Preview Skills Practice Sheet:** Briefly preview the skills practice sheet (**Restructuring Negative Self-Talk In-Session Workbook Pg. 5**)

**Notes:** Timing may vary based on group size. Modify according to group and individual needs.

**Additional resources and activities are located at the end of the Restructuring Negative Self-Talk Slide Deck**

